DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 109 FL 001 354

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TITLE What Kind of Culture?
INSTITUTION Foreign Language Association of Northern Calif., Inc.
PUB DATE May 69
NOTE 4p.; Article appeared in Northern California Foreign Language Newsletter, v17 n68 p9-12 May 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
DESCRIPTORS Cross Cultural Training, Cultural Awareness, Cultural Background, *Cultural Education, Cultural Factors, Educational Attitudes, *Foreign Culture, French, German, *Humanities Instruction, *Language Instruction, *Modern Languages

ABSTRACT

The question of what should be taught as the cultural component of language instruction is discussed, with special reference to German. A present-directed humanism is urged, with emphasis on the relevance and immediacy of cultural materials. Mistaken and irrelevant directions in the teaching of German culture are discussed in some detail; similar problems in the teaching of French culture are mentioned. (AF)

ED037109

MAY, 1969 From: Northern California FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEWSLETTER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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What Kind of Culture?

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Today's address is really the third in a series concerned with teaching culture through language, each address given about a year apart and each, inevitably, leading to a different focus on this vital subject. In the first, entitled "Foreign Language Learning: A Beginning, Not An End", given before the statewide Curriculum Conference in October 1967 and later published in the FLANC *Newsletter* (Vol. XVI, No. 63, pp 8-11). I suggested that the teaching of language skills is not enough and that cultural traditions, the values and attitudes of the people speaking a given language, must be taught along with —and through— the language itself.

A year later, in October 1968, again speaking before the Foreign Language Section of the Curriculum Conference on the subject "Widening Horizons", I added to this the demand that we, the teachers of FLs, not only must teach an appreciation of cultures other than our own, but that we must do so frankly and purposefully as humanists.

Today I should like to carry this theme a step forward and discuss with you less *how* to teach culture through language than *what do we say* when we say "culture". I should like to raise the problem of relevancy in our quest for man and the many cultures he has created or, to put it differently: What is a relevant concept of culture for us who are teaching today, that is at a specific moment in history, in a specific part of our globe, and with the special goals that education sets for us, here and now.

More than 400 years ago, the Italian Humanist, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, wrote his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man.* In this classic expression of Renaissance Humanism he has the Creator say to Man:

"I have set thee at the world's center, that thou mayest with . . . freedom of choice and with . . . honor, as though the master and moulder of thyself, fashion thyself into whatever shape thou shalt prefer". And, carried away by this vision, Pico della Mirandola exclaimed: "O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of Man! to whom it is granted to have that which he chooses, to be that which he wills."—

Almost five hundred years after these words were written, one finds little evidence that Adam's choice justified Giovanni Pico's exaltation or the confidence with which his spiritual successors, the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, believed in the perfectibility of man. In this age of science and technology, when man's material achievements surpass anything the humanists of past centuries could have imagined, the dream of man's glorious freedom seems to have turned into the nightmare of man's inglorious domination by the constantly multiplying mechanical and mechanized creatures of his own making. As automation and the computer more and more become part of our daily life and work, individual man and the spontaneity which is an essential part of his humanity are threatened with being programmed out of existence. We who are teachers, no matter what subject we teach, stand in the frontline of the struggle for the preservation of the individual who today is threatened more by the bloodless and deadening revolution of the computerized society than by the violent social revolutions we are witnessing all over the world.

Particularly for those of us whose task it is to promote an understanding and appreciation of cultures other than our own, the great scientific and technological achievements have not fulfilled their promise. Today we can be in instant contact with any nation on earth, but this instant contact has not meant genuine communication. The most amazing electronic devices yet designed bring us visual and even acoustic impressions of the multitudes of cultures around us, but far too rarely have these impressions become lasting experiences and an integral part of our lives or of our outlook upon life. Our horizon has widened, for everyone of us today knows more of other peoples than was possible in earlier times, but this widening horizon has not led to the abandonment of ancient prejudices and hatreds. We have devised the tools to rendezvous in outer space, but we cannot yet rendezvous with all of the nations on earth. In our fascination with science, that "glorious entertainment" (to speak with Jacques Barzun); we have neglected the Humanities which alone can lead us beyond the world of science to the world of man and the many worlds of cultures other than our own.

I submit that "the world of man" and "the many worlds of cultures other than our own" are synonymous. The "widening horizon" we must seek is our understanding that, whatever language and whatever cultural tradition we teach, we always teach about man and thus something about ourselves. Paradoxical as it may sound, this widening horizon is a looking inward; the discovery that we do not really teach a *foreign* language or a *foreign* culture but basically wondrous varieties of ways in which man everywhere formulates, and deals with problems that are essentially our own. This seems to me the essence of a humanistic education, and I wonder whether the great culture lag of our time is not due to our failure to understand this as it is due to the over-emphasis placed today on science in education.

More than thirty years ago when I began my teaching career, Progressive Education was the rallying cry for all forward-looking educationists. Many of you, I am sure, remember those years. We were called upon not just to bring up scholars but citizens. "Education for citizenship" was the aim— a worthy objective but, as it turned out, not adequate to the needs of the age. In retrospect it would seem that the citizenship which was the goal of our educational effort was rather conformist, emphasizing norms of social adjustment in which the individualism that makes man truly human was stifled— and thus was also stifled an appreciation of the values motivating the non-conforming individual or motivating the individual raised in a different culture. As a result, the citizen we educated was, with rare exceptions, unprepared to meet the exigencies of the contemporary world which then was in the making. It took a world war and its aftermath to make us realize that today nobody can be a good citizen of his own country who is not also, through education and by conviction, a good citizen of the world.

I need not emphasize how important this kind of education is in an age which has thrust unprecedented global responsibilities upon the United States. Good citizenship, in our country perhaps more so than anywhere else, demands empathy with other nations and the conquest of the ignorance and the prejudices which prevent us from understanding others as they prevent us from understanding ourselves. Education therefore must focus on that understanding of other nations, their values, their attitudes and their cultural traditions, which is indispensible to achieving the one world which alone can guarantee the survival of us all.

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Herein lies our special mission as teachers of foreign languages. More than a vehicle for intercultural communication, foreign language teaching must become the key to that understanding of other peoples without which, to quote Norman Cousins in his address before the 1968 Curriculum Conference, "the world cannot be made whole".

But to achieve this, we above all must bring relevance and involvement to our teaching. Particularly now, in this age of crisis both domestic and foreign, involvement is our inescapable obligation. Not necessarily, certainly not only political involvement, but involvement in our hearts and through our work. Teaching has always meant involvement, involvement centering around the student and his mental as well as physical development. Today our involvement must become deeper and beyond our own students must extend to men everywhere and to the problems which have become common for all mankind. And it is this involvement which we must impart to our students.

Because there can be no real involvement without an understanding and appreciation of the world's cultures, the demand has been raised increasingly since the end of the second World War that foreign languages be taught as intercultural understanding. But I wonder whether we have developed a clear notion of just what such understanding must encompass in order to be relevant.

Is it synonymous with a mere awareness of cultural differences? Is it achieved when we demonstrate to our students the many ways in which these cultural differences manifest themselves? Is it, in fact, achieved when we emphasize these cultural differences over the common humanity that unites us all? Last but not least: does the at times bewildering array of teaching aides devised to illustrate these differences help us achieve our dual goal of relevancy and involvement? Or, to ask the question in more specific terms: Have we really gone beyond the clichés that have been fixed in the popular mind about the many peoples of our world?

Since I am most familiar with the teaching of German, I can illustrate my point best by referring to my experiences while teaching that language. Over thirty years ago, I became a member of Delta Phi Alpha, the National German Honor Society, and in the course of my academic career I became a member of other German clubs at the universities with which I became associated. All of them had at least two things in common: German songs and beer. I have, of course, nothing against German songs nor, for that matter, against beer. But coming from Germany myself, I can still remember my amazement at the kind of songs that were sung in these clubs. They were mostly student songs which I, though for three years a student at the University of Berlin, did not recognize or, if I recognized them, would not be caught dead singing. For in Germany —at least in the Germany of the Weimer Republic in which I grew up— they were sung mostly by the members of the traditional duelling fraternities which after World War I had become an anachronism. The vast majority of German students during the Weimer years did not belong to these fraternities and did not sing these songs. This apparently had not yet reached Delta Phi Alpha and the several German clubs to which I belonged. They —and we must remember that we speak of teachers as well as students— clung to the cliché of German *Gemütlichkeit,* come hell or high water— come the Weimar Republic or Nazi Germany.

Even after the second World War this cliché remained. In the summer of 1967 I was a visiting professor at the Stanford Institute for Advanced Study in German held in Bad Boll near Stuttgart. It was the American students —and most of their professors— who sang these songs while drinking beer, much to the delight of the oldtimers in that village. But I did not see many German students joining with them. To be sure, at some universities in Germany the duelling fraternities and their beer busts have returned, but they are not typical of German university life. The vast majority of German students today have left all that behind.

I submit that the cliché we have developed about German *Gemütlichkeit* derived, incidentally, from the behavior pattern of a specific and none-too-numerous class, not of all Germans, now has become thoroughly dated. It is a romanticized notion of German ways that bore little resemblance to the totality of German life when it first was formed, and bears none now. It can contribute nothing to our understanding of Germany and the Germans— yet it persists. It persists as much as our notions about Germany as the country of quaint medieval towns in which the tempo of life is as placid as of yore. Hardly a German textbook exists without its photo of Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber, carefully taken from an angle that avoids any evidence of modernity and shows the town as the sleepy medieval community it once was.

Of course, Rothenburg and the many other beautiful German towns that still charm us exist,— reminders of the past, but of a past that is long gone.

Most of you, I am sure, know as I do from bitter experience that today nothing is more difficult than to photograph one of these quaint and lovely towns and its famous architectural landmarks free of the clutter of cars, tourist buses, or Coca Cola signs. Yet I know of no cultural German reader that tells us about life in Rothenburg today, with its stresses and strains, with the problems posed by the persistence of this lovely anachronism in the world of contemporary technology with its increasing mechanization of life— and with its traffic jams.

Our romantic notions about culture — which we define in terms of German *Kultur* rather than, as we should, in the meaning given it by the anthropologist— tend to make our teaching irrelevant for the present. We cannot really claim to teach an understanding of German culture, i.e. of the Germany that our students will encounter, if we disregard the present. Yet I know of no German reader that focuses on the tremendous changes that have come to German society since the end of the war. I know of no German reader,that, e.g. tells of the protest movement among German students today rather than of their duels and beer busts that are relics of the past. Nor do I know of any German cultural reader that discusses political life in Germany today, that tells, e.g., of the rise of the National Democratic Party in postwar Germany, or better, bring us excerpts from its newspapers or from the speeches of its leaders.

And where is the German cultural reader that discusses meaningfully —and I stress the word "meaningfully"— the two Germanies that exist today and will continue to exist for decades to come? No matter what our students may know about the partition of Germany from reading the newspapers or watching television newsreels, in most of our texts we continue blissfully to speak of German culture as one and indivisible and, if we mention partition at all, we discuss it from the dated premise of one Germany, one Germany which collapsed a quarter century ago and which, incidentally, existed for only seventy-five years.

Is it not time that we as teachers —in the classroom and through the texts we produce— take cognizance of the history of the last twenty-four years (almost one third of the total existence of a unified German *Reich*) and present to our students these problems that face the peoples of both Germanies: their common concerns as well as their differences and the

efforts made by both to overcome the difficulties that confront them individually as well as collectively? And speaking of these differences: Where is the German cultural reader that discusses them in terms other than political? That tells us —what is common knowledge among Germans of the Federal Republic as well as the Democratic Republic— that socially and in their attitudes and values the two German peoples are growing apart, much to the concern of thoughtful individuals both East and West?

Are we as teachers of German aware of the differences that have crept into the languages of the two Germanies? A process that will continue as each country endows its language with meanings that are fully comprehensible only in the context of its own society and its own culture? Germans themselves are aware of this, as evidenced by a hilarious skit presented several years ago at a joint performance of two famous West German cabarets (the *Stachelschwein* of West Berlin and the Munich *Lach- und Schiessgesellschaft*) in which a young couple from East Berlin visits relatives, a young couple living in West Berlin. The two families could not communicate because words no longer had the same meaning for both. It was a scene of great humor but, like all true humor, based upon a tragic reality. Are we teaching this reality to our students?*)

One last point concerning the teaching of German: In our proneness to overlook the existence of the second Germany we also overlook the rise of a significant group of young authors without whom any discussion of contemporary German literature remains incomplete. A number of highly important works have been published in the German Democratic Republic, and yet I know from personal experience only one course dealing with that literature (taught by Professor Boeninger of Stanford University) and from hearsay of one other. Quite possibly such courses are taught at other universities (although one does not find them in any catalogs), but one thing is certain: In our texts and in our readers you will find precious little about or by these authors. Among the German texts exhibited at this conference, for example, only one German reader contains excerpts from two of these authors among more than a dozen West German authors that are represented.

Today a growing number of our students, in fact the best among them, demand that our teaching must be relevant to the experiences they have or are likely to have. I cannot help wondering what kind of relevancy our teaching of German has for them when we maintain the fiction and established clichés about one Germany and one German culture.

Of course this situation is not limited to the teaching of German. There is, it seems, an innate disinclination among teachers of foreign languages to stray away from the traditional, i.e. the "classic" culture and venture into the more uncertain realm of interpreting the present. Do our Spanish teachers discuss Franco Spain or the contemporary situation in the Latin American republics that are our neighbors? Do our French teachers discuss the France of De Gaulle in their courses on French civilization, or do they discuss French civilization in terms of Molière and Racine, or of Voltaire and the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment with an outlook toward the present in which Camus is the ultimate of French contemporaneity?

It seems that most of our teachers feel —or at least felt until he decided to emancipate Europe from American tutelage— a certain relief at the advent of De Gaulle who, we are told, put a stop to the well known political instability of the French people. I wonder how many of us are aware (and teach) that the French multiparty system —presumably the cause of this seeming instability and, incidentally, stemming directly from Rousseau's concern for democratic government— was the result of bitter national experiences with two Napoleons and, until the advent of the Fifth Republic, did what it was designed to accomplish: prevent the usurpation of power by another Napoleon. I wonder how many of us have discussed in our classes the near-revolution of French students and workers, last year, in the light of the legacy left the French people by the never finished revolutions of 1789 and 1848.

One could, of course, elaborate further on this theme, but the examples taken from the two languages with which I am most familiar should suffice to state my case. Of course, I am drawing a picture in stark black-and-white contrasts. A vast amount of materials exists that deal cogently with the many manifestations of the world's major cultures. But how often, and to what extent, are these materials chosen because they conform to —and thus reinforce— the clichés about the world's peoples that persist among us?

When we present to our students the great works created among the people whose culture is being discussed, do we present them in a manner that tells us something meaningful about that people, or do we present them —and sometimes analyze them to death— as sufficient unto themselves and, incidentally, unto ourselves? Are we concerned with what Goethe's *Faust* or Rabelais' *Gargantua* mean to us or with what they can tell us about certain intellectual trends in French or German society at a specific moment in their history? Above all, are we aware that even the greatest works of art are not synonymous with the totality of ideas and attitudes of the society in which they are created? And do we teach our students that within the culture itself the attitude to a great work of art or to its creator may change?

To take again an example from the language and culture with which I am most familiar: Is it, e.g., too heretical to ask what relevance Goethe has for the German student of today? We continue adding to the vast number of books that have been written to prove such relevance for Goethe the poet, the creative artist who has given us immortal works. But with the political awakening that characterizes the German student today, as it characterizes students throughout the world, must we not look for another criterion: the political relevance of Goethe? Should we not ask, and ask this of our students, what in our revolutionary age can be the relevance of Goethe the conservative, the representative of the "establishment" (he was, after all, Minister of State of Saxe-Weimar), the opponent of the French Revolution? Can we explain to our students, or can we even try to understand, the movement among the world's youth unless we try to answer questions such as these?

One final example: All our students have heard about Rudi Dutschke, if not earlier then certainly a few months ago when he was shot by a political opponent. Recently, Mike Wallace interviewed Cohn-Bendit for his television program "60 Minutes", and we may be reasonably sure that this interview was seen by a number of our students. Are we, their teachers, trying to be equally topical in our class discussions? Above all, are we ourselves trying to come to grips with the phenomenon of a Rudi Dutschke or a Cohn-Bendit so that we can explain it meaningfully in our discussions of contemporary France or Germany?

As you undoubtedly have noticed by now, I have added to the demand that the teacher must be a humanist, a second demand: that he must become relevant. In other words: what we teach about a culture must be more than a medium for intercultural understanding; it must be relevant.

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*) The performance has been recorded and thus is available to teachers. I wonder whether it will ever become part of our teaching materials.

And a foreign culture can become relevant for us only if we feel and teach that empathy with its present manifestations which enables us to understand, and to a certain extent identify ourselves with the peoples —those now living— whose culture is concerned and whose language we teach. What matters is not only that we see other peoples in the light of their own values and attitudes, or that we understand the traditions that have given rise to these values and attitudes. What matters is that we remain constantly alert to the new meanings which each cultural tradition acquires with the passing of each today into yesterday. What matters is that we recognize and teach that attitudes and values in a culture may change as the life experiences of its people change in the course of history.

The word "attitude" is the key in yet another sense. We cannot escape the fact that we teach more than our subject matter, we teach attitudes, i.e. certain ways of looking at our subject, certain ways of looking at the peoples whose languages we teach. And it is our own attitudes toward these peoples which we pass on to our students and which may determine significantly the development of their outlook upon this world and its peoples.

In my address of last October I drew from these reflections the conclusion that ultimately this must lead us to recognize that we as teachers can fulfill our mission only if we are and remain convinced and dedicated humanists; if we emphasize in our teaching as well as through our deeds man not only as the measure of all things, but as essentially ourselves in many guises, speaking many tongues, acting out the role history has assigned him in many different ways throughout the world. Today I want to add to this appeal the dimensions of relevance and immediacy.

Too many of us view the culture of a nation basically as its past achievements and thus as something static and eternal. In a certain extent this is unavoidable: in the perspective of time, all cultural creations tend to become "classic" and thus frozen in time— and in our teaching. As we glory in the humanism of Athens or in the ideals of the Italian Humanists and the French *philosophes,* we tend to view Greek, Italian or French culture as epitomized by these movements, and thus we are apt to pass by the plight of the Greek people today, the present struggle of the Italians for achieving a stable and just society, or the social and economic problems of the French people in the Fifth Republic of De Gaulle.

As most of you know, I am primarily an historian. The study of man's past is both my vocation and my avocation. But the past is important because it is relevant for the present and can be a portent for the future. Whether we study individuals or nations, we find in the past clues to problems that plague us today, and thus we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and of the situation in which we find ourselves. I submit that the culture we teach must be the total culture, i.e. it must be the culture of today for the understanding of which the past furnishes us with clues and to which the past is but a prelude.

For us, but even more so for our students, the only cultures that are relevant are the cultures of *present-day humanity.* This to me is the *true Humanism— the active Humanism concerned with men living today, the Humanism that is ever trying to understand the values and the attitudes of those who share this globe with us now.* Behind all national or cultural differences we not only must seek and find the common humanity of us all; more than that, we must seek and find the contemporaries whose concerns are essentially our own.

To paraphrase that famous exhortation which epitomizes the awakening of Renaissance Humanism:

The proper study of man is man, the contemporary.— The proper study of culture is life, that is the living cultures that surround us today on this ever shrinking globe.